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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 002378

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: CONTINUING PROTESTS AGAINST MEDIA ORDINANCE

REF: A. KATHMANDU 2229

[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 2360

Classified By: DCM Elisabeth I. Millard. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

PROTESTS FAILING TO GARNER GENERAL PUBLIC SUPPORT  
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[1](#)1. (U) Nepalese journalists, lawyers and politicians jointly launched protest programs across the country against the King's new stringent media ordinance (ref A). The protests, however, have so far failed to gain much public support. As reported ref B, the October 28 bandh was generally observed, but only 1,500 people participated in the rally organized by the seven-party alliance in Kathmandu, according to Nepal Police Headquarters. Bhagirath Yogi, Chairman of the Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies, put the number at closer to 5,000 people, but even that number was far less than expected, demonstrating the current lack of general public support.

JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AND RELEASED  
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[1](#)2. (U) Bishnu Nisthuri, President of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), told EmbOff that 16 journalists were arrested in Kathmandu, 24 in Sunsari District, and three in Lamjung District, for protesting in prohibited areas on October 28. Police released all the journalists the same evening, except for one reporter in Lamjung District. Over the weekend of October 29 and 30, journalists, lawyers and politicians staged protest demonstrations in eastern Nepal in Dharan, in western Nepal in Pokhara, and a torch rally in central Nepal in Dhading District, as well as Sarlahi, Saptari and Mahottari Districts in the Terai. However, all failed to muster large numbers of participants.

COMMENT  
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[1](#)3. (C) Although newspapers front-page the protests, arrests, and international condemnation, there has yet to be a groundswell of support to press for a repeal of the media ordinance. The impending five-day Tihar holiday may be one reason for the public's relative lack of engagement in the issue. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is debating the constitutionality of the media ordinance.

MORIARTY